

The Rise of Russia

Russia's Expansionist Policies and the Need for Revival

During the fourteenth century, the Duchy of Moscow took the lead in liberating Russia from the Mongols. Ivan III refused to pay the Mongols tribute and because of the decline of Mongol power, this successfully broke Russia free from Mongol rule. Ivan III gave his government a military focus, and utilized a blend of nationalism and the orthodox Christian religion to succeed by 1480, in creating a large, independent state.

The Mongols, content to leave local administration in indigenous hands, had not reshaped basic Russian culture. The occupation did reduce the vigor of cultural and economic life. Literacy declined and the economy became purely agricultural and dependent on peasant labor. Ivan III restored the tradition of centralized rule, added a sense of imperial mission, and claimed supervision over all Orthodox churches. Russia, asserted Ivan III, had succeeded Byzantium as the "Third Rome." Ivan IV continued Russian expansion. He united more areas of Russia and expanded eastward. They recruited peasants and offered them freedom from their lords if they were to settle in these new lands in the east. The catch was that the peasants had to conquer that land themselves. Peasant-soldiers known as Cossacks expanded the territory of Russia well into Siberia in the north and to the Caspian Sea in the south. He increased the power of the tsar or czar (Russian for Caesar) by killing many of the nobility (also known as Boyars), and executed anyone that was a threat to his power, including his son, for this he became known as Ivan the Terrible.

1. How did Ivan III create an independent Russia?
2. How did Ivan IV expand his country and his power?

Western Contact and Romanov Policy

The tsars, mindful of the cultural and economic lag occurring under Mongol rule, also began a policy of carefully managed contacts with the West. Ivan III dispatched diplomatic missions to leading Western states; under Ivan IV British merchants established trading contacts. Italian artists brought in by the tsars built churches and the Kremlin, creating a distinct style of architecture. When Ivan IV died without an heir the Times of Troubles commenced. The boyars tried to control government, while Sweden and Poland seized territory. In 1613 the boyars chose a member of the Romanov family, Michael, as tsar. The Time of Troubles had ended without placing lasting constraints on the tsar's power. Michael restored internal order, drove out the foreign invaders, and recommended expansion. Russia secured part of the Ukraine and pushed its border to Ottoman lands.

1. How did Russia's contact with the West begin?
2. How did the Romanov family end the Time of Troubles?

Peter the Great and Westernization

By the end of the seventeenth century Russia, although remaining more of an agricultural state, was a great land empire. Peter I or Peter the Great continued past policies, but added a new interest in changing the economy and culture through imitation of Western forms. It was their first westernization attempt in history. Peter traveled incognito to the West and gained interest in science and technology. Many Western artisans returned with him to Russia.

Peter was an autocratic ruler, which meant that he had absolute power; revolts were brutally suppressed. Reforms were initiated through state decrees. Peter increased the power of the state through recruitment of bureaucrats from outside the aristocracy and by forming a Western style military force. A secret police was created to prevent dissent and watch over the bureaucracy. Peter won a successful war with Sweden and that gave Russia a window on the Baltic Sea, allowing it to be a major factor in European diplomatic and military affairs. Peter's capital, reflecting the shift of interests, moved to the Baltic city of St. Petersburg.

Peter's reforms influenced politics, economics, and cultural change. The bureaucracy and military were reorganized on Western principles. The first Russian navy was created. The councils of nobles were eliminated and replaced by advisors under the tsar's control. Provincial governors were appointed from the center, while elected town councils were under royal authority. Law codes were systemized and the tax system reformed to increase burdens on the peasantry. In economic affairs, metallurgical and mining industries expanded. Landlords were rewarded for using serfs in manufacturing operations. The changes ended the need to import for military purposes. Cultural reforms aimed at bringing in Western patterns to change old customs. Nobles had to shave their beards and dress in Western style. Peter attempted to provide increased education in mathematics and technical subjects. He succeeded in bringing the elite into the Western cultural zone. The condition of upper class women improved. The first effort in Westernization embodied features present in later ventures in other lands. The changes were selective; they did not involve ordinary people. No attempt was made to form an exporting industrial economy. These changes, although important to the growth of Russia, were met with opposition from all classes in society.

1. Who is Peter the Great?
2. How did he gain ideas from the West?
3. How did Peter prove his autocratic rule?
4. What were some ways Peter improved Russia?

Tales of Ivan the Terrible

“By the age of 13, Ivan was already a disturbed young man and an accomplished drinker. He threw dogs and cats from the Kremlin walls to watch them suffer, and roamed the Moscow streets with a gang of young scoundrels, drinking, knocking down old people and raping women. He often disposed of rape victims by having them hanged, strangled, buried alive or thrown to the bears. He became an excellent horseman and was fond of hunting. Killing animals was not his only delight; Ivan also enjoyed robbing and beating up farmers. Meanwhile he continued to devour books at an incredible pace, mainly religious and historical texts. At times Ivan was very devote; he used to throw himself before the icons, banging his head against the floor. It resulted in a callosity at his forehead. Ivan even made a public confession of his sins in Moscow.

Ivan the Terrible used to carry a metal-pointed staff with him, which he used to lash out at people who offended him. Once, he had peasant women stripped naked and used as target practice by his Oprichniki (secret police). Another time, he had several hundred beggars drowned in a lake. A boyar was set on a barrel of gunpowder and blown to bits. Jerome Horsey wrote how Prince Boris Telupa *"was drawn upon a long sharp-made stake, which entered the lower part of his body and came out of his neck; upon which he languished a horrible pain for 15 hours alive, and spoke to his mother, brought to behold that woeful sight. And she was given to 100 gunners, who defiled her to death, and the Emperor's hungry hounds devoured her flesh and bones"*. His treasurer, Nikita Funikov, was boiled to death in a cauldron. His councilor, Ivan Viskovaty, was hung, while Ivan's entourage took turns hacking off pieces of his body.

In 1570, on the basis of *unproved* accusations of treason, Ivan sacked and burned the city of Novgorod and tortured, mutilated, impaled, roasted, and otherwise massacred its citizens. A German mercenary wrote: *"Mounting a horse and brandishing a spear, he charged in and ran people through while his son watched the entertainment"*. Novgorod's archbishop was first sewn up in a bearskin and then hunted and ravaged to death by a pack of hounds. Men, women and children were tied to sleighs, which were then run into the freezing waters of the Volkhov River. The mass of corpses made it flood its banks. Novgorod never recovered. Later the cities suffered a similar fate.”

1. How did Ivan IV get his nickname Ivan the Terrible?
2. Why do you think he did the things he did?
3. Whose account would help give the reader a better understanding of Ivan the Terrible?